



Pick Your Path to Health

Protecting Yourself Against Domestic Violence

Living in an abusive relationship jeopardizes your health.

Domestic violence (or intimate partner violence) is the leading cause of injury to women in America. It has also been associated with the risk of attempted or completed suicide, which is among the leading causes of death in Asian Americans.

Domestic violence is typically defined as abuse that is committed by a current or past spouse, boyfriend, partner, or girlfriend. The types of abuse include physical assault, sexual assault, emotional abuse, and verbal abuse.

When a woman is in an abusive relationship, she usually experiences stress, nervousness, and uncertainty. In some cases, she may not feel confident enough^{3/4}or she may be too frightened^{3/4}to make her own decisions, says Nanda Shewmangal with the Asian Task Force Against Domestic Violence (ATFADV) in Boston.

The consequences of physical and emotional violence against women go beyond the fear and the immediate results of each episode of abuse. Abused women can experience broken bones, fractures, ruptured organs, dislocated limbs, and other terrible injuries from physical and sexual assault. They can also suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, clinical depression, other psychiatric disorders, and alcohol or drug abuse.

"Domestic violence stems from a legacy of male dominance and sexism that is widespread in many Asian communities," says Family Violence Prevention Fund Associate Director Leni Marin. Asian American women suffer from violence at alarming rates. Yet far too many Asian women must still deal with this violence alone, often without emotional or financial support. Many Asian communities lack the strong health, social welfare, and judicial systems that can prevent domestic violence by providing early intervention.

While it may be difficult to accept that the person you love may be hurting you, it is possible that the way an intimate partner treats you can be considered abuse. Has there been a time when your husband, boyfriend, or partner hit, kicked, or slapped you? Have you ever been verbally

abused by this person? If you find yourself in these situations, you may be a victim of domestic violence.

Shocked to learn that? Domestic violence can happen to any woman. According to Nanda, AFTADV recently conducted a study which found that 48.8 percent of the Asian population reported knowing a woman who has been physically abused.

The root causes of men's violence against women include issues of power and control as well as alcohol and drug abuse. It is estimated that alcohol is involved in 56 percent of domestic violence cases, according to Journal of the American Medical Association. Other factors can contribute to men's violent behavior, such as poverty, unemployment, and growing up in a violent or abusive household.

This October has been designated as Domestic Violence Awareness Month. If you are in an abusive relationship, or if you know somebody who is in one, it's time to find help. Keep in mind that your health and your family's health is at risk.

- Remember: It is not your fault-You are not to blame. You didn't cause the violence to happen. You don't deserve to be beaten, threatened, or belittled.
- Seek help-There are many organizations and resources that are committed to preventing domestic violence. They can help you.
- Dial the confidential National Domestic Violence Hotline 1-800-799-SAFE. It provides information on emergency shelters and assistance programs.
- Call the National Women's Health Information Center (NWHIC) at 1-800-994-WOMAN if you have questions about domestic violence or other forms of violence against women or visit at www.4woman.gov.
- Visit the web site of the Asian Task Force Against Domestic Violence (ATFADV) at <http://www.atask.org> to get more information in your language about domestic violence.
- Break away from an abusive relationship-Keep in mind that leaving a violent relationship can be very difficult and dangerous. Have a plan. Be prepared to leave quickly, have a packed bag ready, and keep it in an easy-to-reach place. Don't tell the abuser that you are planning to leave. Keep the phone numbers of shelters, hotlines, nearby hospitals, and other emergency contacts with you.
- Arrange alternatives ahead of time-Let a neighbor know about past incidents of domestic violence, and ask them to call the police if they

- hear suspicious noises coming from your house. Have a plan for where you will go if you have to leave in a hurry.
- Establish your own bank account-Open an account in your name to establish and increase your independence.

Protecting yourself and your family from domestic violence can put you on a path to better health.

Pick Your Path to Health is a national public health campaign sponsored by the Office on Women's Health within the U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services. For more information about the campaign or to subscribe to the listserv to receive tips on improving your health, call 1-800-994-WOMAN or TDD at 1-888-220-5446, or visit the National Women's Health Information Center at www.4woman.gov.